



Understanding the European Union as a Global Gender Actor **The Holistic Intersectional and Inclusive Study of Gender+ in External Actions**

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Understanding the European Union as a Global Gender Actor: The Holistic Intersectional and Inclusive Study of Gender+ in External Actions

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journals.sagepub.com/home/psrev**Petra Debusscher¹ and Ian Manners²** 

Abstract

This article assesses the study of gender equality policies in European Union external actions with a focus on the theoretical and empirical routes to understanding the field in times of crises. It argues that the emerging body of literature on gender in European Union external relations makes it possible to explain, understand, and judge the European Union in global politics by rethinking the nature of power from a gender perspective. The article then argues that to develop gender and European Union external relations in its next decade, it is necessary to rethink the study of the European Union as a global gender actor. This encompasses a reassessment of the 'European Union', 'gender', and the 'global', as well as the development of a holistic macro-, meso-, and micro-analysis. The article concludes by proposing a distinctive theoretical and methodological approach which involves a holistic intersectional and inclusive study of gender+ in European Union external actions.

Keywords

European Union, gender, external actions, intersectional, inclusive

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Introduction: Gender in the European Union's External Actions

The European Union (EU) stands out among regional organisations in its early support, and treaty-based mainstreaming, of the goal of gender equality (Chaban et al, 2017). Gender equality is at the core of European values and is enshrined within the EU's legal and political framework. The EU aims to be at 'the forefront of the protection, fulfilment

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and the enjoyment of human rights by women and girls and strongly promotes them in all external relations', in 'developing, enlargement and neighbourhood countries, including in fragile, conflict and emergency situations' (Council of the EU, 2015: 2 and 8). Despite the fact that external policy is one of the oldest policy areas where the EU has advanced gender mainstreaming, scholars have not yet systematically attempted to analyse gender equality across the whole of the EU's external actions. External relations scholarship studying gender equality generally focusses on only one area such as development policy, trade policy, or neighbourhood policy. The Gender Action Plan (GAP II) for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations (2016–2020) announced by the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) in September 2015 suggests that a more holistic approach to studying gender equality in EU external actions is appropriate.

As Muehlenhoff et al. (submitted) have set out, the promotion of gender equality in EU external relations in times of crisis provides the current context for understanding the EU as a global gender actor. These crises have escalated since the end of the Cold War and the triumphalism of neoliberal ideology, but in the twenty-first century there are a series of intertwined crises for the EU linking economic, social, conflictual, environmental and political spheres (Lynggaard et al., 2015: 15; Manners and Rosamond, 2018: 28; Manners and Whitman, 2016: 3, 10).

The crises of neoliberalism, transnational capital, global financial crises and Eurozone sovereign debt drive the other crises and increasingly sideline the goals of (gender) equality inside and outside the EU (Rubery, 2015; Walby, 2015). These crises have simultaneously heightened social inequalities driven by ideological austerity in Euro and non-Euro countries such as Greece and the UK, making effective policies for addressing the roots, branches and fallout of the ongoing refugee crisis almost impossible to achieve (Kennet, 2017). At the same time, the resurgence of nineteenth-century imperialisms, multipolarity and the rise of nationalist populism currently manifested in Putin's Russia, Erdoğan's Turkey, Xi's China, Modi's India, Trump's USA, and Bolsonaro's Brazil, together with the return of the far-right to European politics, have created an extremely hostile environment for gender equality advocates. The combination of Eurozone economic and social problems such as austerity in Greece and high levels of unemployment during the 2010s, together with the 2015 refugee crisis, feeds support for far-right movements, parties and governments across the EU. As Sylvia Walby (2018a, 2018b) has argued, these crises have significant consequences for gender equality within the EU, including the question of the 'gender regime' and the potential relationship between the far-right and gender violence. The ecological crisis is the long-term result of the failure to address environmental crises of unsustainable consumption, life-threatening pollution, the sixth mass extinction of biodiversity, and the climate crisis consequences for life on earth. It is already clear that environmental crises have significant gendered consequences, while at the same time EU responses to climate change tend to displace gender equality policies (Buckingham and Le Masson, 2017).

While it is clear that all of these crises are linked together, what is less clear is what they do to EU gender equality promotion. In the introduction, Muehlenhoff et al. (submitted) suggest that crises may provide windows of opportunity for putting gender equality on the agenda, as several key planning documents such as the EU GAP and the Global Strategy have done (see also Abels and MacRae, 2020). However, it is also clear that crises are also a key feature of 'disaster capitalism' (Klein, 2007) where the economic shock doctrine and ideological austerity are used to subvert democracy and suppress progressive political

agenda. As the contributions by Allwood (2019) and Hoijtink and Muehlenhoff (2019) make clear, EU crises have tended to promote the securitisation of the migration–security–climate change nexus and masculated Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), at the expense of gender equality. Hence, our discussion of EU crises must take account of the holistic nature of the crises, must interrogate how crises affect different intersectionalities differently, and must advocate more inclusive approaches to addressing the effects of EU crises on gender equality (see also Sloomaeckers, 2019).

In what follows, we analyse the scholarship on gender in EU external relations and argue it is necessary to rethink the study of the EU as a global gender actor. The aim of this article is to critically assess the literature’s strengths, difficulties, and contradictions and set out three ways of further developing this scholarship in its second decade, involving a reassessment of the ‘EU’, ‘gender’, and the ‘global’. The article proceeds in three parts. In the first section, we review the literature on EU gender and external policy and outline three methodological limitations. In the second theoretical section, we explore the main theoretical dilemmas that underlie these methodological limitations and the study of gender equality in EU external relations in general. In the third section, we build on these findings to propose a reassessment of the ‘EU’, ‘gender’, and the ‘global’ and set out a distinctive theoretical and methodological approach to study gender equality in EU external actions.

The article engages with Muehlenhoff et al.’s (submitted) research questions by utilising the tripartite analytical framework of the normative power approach (NPA) based on the principles of EU external actions, how these principles shape external actions, and what impact these principles and actions have on gender equality (Manners, 2008: 47, 2018: 330). The construction and identification of the previously discussed crises on the principle of gender equality in EU external actions are addressed in the macro-approach of section ‘Reassessing the global’. The responses and proposed actions to these crises are considered in the meso-characterisation of the EU in section ‘Reassessing the EU’. Finally, the impact of the crises on principles and actions of gender equality are analysed in the micro-level analysis in section ‘Reassessing gender’.

State of the Art: Somewhere, Not Everywhere

Scholarship on gender equality in EU external actions has become a vibrant field that produces timely research on policies of development, enlargement, trade, peace, security and defence, conflict, and climate crisis. While feminist work on *internal* EU policies has a long history, feminist scholarship on EU *external relations* as a distinct and established field of study is a somewhat newer field (see Šimáková, 2018). Scholarship on gender equality policies in EU external relations is located at the crossroads of feminist politics and policy studies, international relations and EU studies. We take into consideration relevant scholarship since the Amsterdam Treaty of 1999, as this represents the moment the EU explicitly commits to include gender into all its internal and external policies.

A first research line has focussed on the adoption and implementation of gender equality principles and policies in EU external relations (Bretherton, 2001; Lister and Carbone, 2006; Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2000; Spehar, 2012), while a second one has been examining what this means for its identity as a global gender actor by drawing on the normative power approach (David and Guerrina, 2013; Debuscher, 2011; Garcia and Masselot, 2015; Guerrina and Wright, 2016; Pető and Manners, 2006). Most of these studies focus on one policy sector such as development (Holvoet and Inberg, 2015; Lister

and Carbone, 2006; Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2000); enlargement, accession and Europeanisation (Bretherton, 2001; Chiva, 2009; Krizsán and Zentai, 2006; Kunz and Maisenbacher, 2015; Muehlenhoff, 2019; Spehar, 2012); security and defence (Guerrina et al., 2018; Guerrina and Wright, 2016; Haastrup, 2018; Kronsell, 2012; Kronsell and Manners, 2015; Stern, 2011); trade (Hoskyns, 2008; True, 2009a); migration (Allwood, 2015; Mushaben, 2012); or climate crisis (Allwood, 2014; Kronsell, 2013). Other studies apply a geographical lens by focussing on certain regions (Lister and Carbone, 2006; Van der Vleuten et al., 2014). This body of work has been highly relevant in scrutinising mainstream EU foreign affairs literature with a critical gender lens unveiling previously hidden aspects of power, agency, and structure. It explains, understands, and judges the EU's role in global politics by rethinking the nature of power from a gender perspective and its (un)intended consequences on people's lives – both in and outside EU territory.

This body of literature, however, shows a few methodological limitations. First, while the state of the art on gender equality in EU external actions provides many examples of excellent work in some areas of policy (e.g. enlargement, trade, development, security and defence, migration), there is not work everywhere. For example, in other areas of EU 'foreign affairs', there is far less gender equality work on Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), counter-terrorism, crisis response, drugs, energy diplomacy, human rights and democracy (see list of Foreign Affairs Policy Areas at eeas.europa.eu/policies). This means, to adapt the phrase of Painter and Ulmer (2002), instead of gender mainstreaming being 'everywhere and nowhere', gender equality in EU external actions scholarship is 'somewhere, not everywhere'. In addition, there is little work which aims at examining the connections between policy fields (exceptions being Allwood, 2013; Šimáková, 2018; Van der Vleuten et al., 2014).

Second, this scholarship generally tends to deal almost exclusively with what happens in the Brussels-based institutions such as the Commission and EEAS by analysis of primary EU resources, sometimes complemented with expert interviews (exceptions including Debusscher, 2014, 2015, 2019; Holvoet and Inberg, 2015). Yet, the consortium of European institutions dealing with external actions is complex and multiple, operating at different levels (both at European level and at the level of each partner country through permanent diplomatic staff). On top of that, crucial changes in development and European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) thinking in the past 15 years have brought country ownership centre stage and have led to a partnership approach which puts the partner country in the driving seat of development, cooperation, and partnership processes. To date, the role of the partner countries as well as the interplay between the EU institutions, delegation, and partner countries' institutions and civil society has remained much outside scholarly attention. Our review highlights the need to involve non-EU sources and data when researching gender in EU external actions.

Finally, on reviewing the emerging literature, we have found that up to now the focus has been largely on gender equality in isolation, while the link with other sources of discrimination has received less attention (e.g. Allwood, 2013; Debusscher, 2011; Lister and Carbone, 2006; Pető and Manners, 2006; Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2000). However, after years of gender policies and mainstreaming, external action planners and practitioners are increasingly being urged to take multiple and intersecting inequalities into account rather than focusing on one dimension of social inequality alone (Grünenfelder and Schurr, 2015). Also, in internal EU equality policy, the focus has increasingly expanded in the past decade to cover multiple equality strands including race and ethnicity, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation (Kantola, 2010). The

question whether multiple inequalities and intersectionality are also being taken up in EU external policies remains to be answered, although Allwood's (2019) and Welfrens' (2019) contributions to this Special Issue, as well as Kaijser and Kronsell's (2014), address intersectionality in EU development, refugee and climate policies.

In what follows, we discuss three broader theoretical challenges that the study of gender in EU external relations has at its core and that underlie these methodological shortcomings: the close alignment with foreign policy analysis (FPA), the context of the EU's colonial history, and the researcher's dilemma '(how) can one speak for subaltern women?'.

Broader Underlying Problems of Studying Gender Equality in EU External Actions

Scholarship on gender equality in EU external actions has a number of central problems at its core, reflecting broader challenges of studying the global relations of former empires in the field of gender power relations. The first of these problems is that the study of the EU as a global actor has previously been stuck in the sub-field of FPA and all the ideological baggage that came with the assumptions of state-centric power relations of FPA. One response to this problem was to bring together international political theory with the study of the EU found in the NPA that raises normative questions on the meaning of 'actorness' and 'power' (Manners, 2013). Equally important is the way the NPA works within critical social theory to suggest that 'it is far more appropriate to talk of complex, multiple, relational identities constructed from a diversity of differences such as gender, class, race, age, education, and locality, rather than only nationality' (Manners and Whitman, 2003: 396). Working within critical social theory, the NPA emphasises questions of legitimacy of principles, acts of recognising the Other and reconciliatory impacts in EU external actions in order to avoid the construction of 'simple, single, categorical' identities of state actors (Manners, 2018). Thus, the NPA explicitly problematises normative questions such as whether, what and how *should* the EU be promoting gender equality in external actions, particularly in times of crises (David and Guerrina, 2013: 53; Debuscher, 2011: 46–47; Guerrina and Wright, 2016: 296; Kronsell, 2016: 107–108; Manners, 2008: 52–53; Pető and Manners, 2006: 108–110).

The second of these problems is that the study of the EU as a global actor is situated in long-standing colonial contexts:

[i]t is worth acknowledging the impact of Europe's colonial past. European states (including Russia) have, over the past 500 years, conquered and colonised virtually every single corner of the world in one form or another . . . From this perspective Europe can be seen to be the exploiter of the world, with its relations being characterised by a combination of colonial legacy, predominance in international institutions, and continued exploitation through the forces of globalisation (Manners, 2000: 182).

It is this postcolonial context and neo-colonial crisis which demands an engagement between postcolonial studies and the analysis of the EU as a global actor. Over the past decade, scholarship on the EU has emphasised the colonial origins of the EU, the postcolonial move into Europe, and current EU postcolonial relations. The use of postcolonial scholarship, such as the work of Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, as well as scholars working on the European consequences of colonialism, such as Julia Kristeva, Étienne Balibar, and Pierre Bourdieu, has become far more common in

the study of the EU as a global actor (see discussions in Manners, 2000, 2006, 2013a; Manners and Whitman, 2003).

The third of these problems is that studying the EU as a global actor in gender power relations involves the question of who speaks for women. In many respects, this problem combines with the previous problem to revisit and ask loudly Spivak's 1988 question, 'Can the subaltern speak?' In other words, are privileged European scholars speaking on behalf of women outside of Europe? These questions have come to the fore in recent years in the study of gender in EU external actions (Kunz and Maisenbacher, 2015), in particular questions of 'who has a say?' (Debusscher, 2011: 45), 'telling silences' (Debusscher and van der Vleuten, 2012), and 'including women's voices?' (Debusscher and Hulse, 2014). The approach taken here is to argue that it is the role of feminist research to enhance women's capacity for self-determination methodologically and to hear the voices of women that might otherwise not be heard in EU external relations in times of crisis (Debusscher, 2015).

The rest of this article suggests how to address these gaps in the methods and analysis of gender equality in EU external actions by reassessing the way the EU engages with the lives of others and by advocating the need for a holistic study of global gender equality. To develop gender and EU external relations in the next decade, it is necessary to rethink the way we study the EU as a global gender actor. In the following sections, we put forward our argument involving a reassessment of the actor 'EU', of the subject 'gender', and of the context 'global'.

Reassessing the EU, Gender, and the Global: The EU as a Global Gender Actor in the Lives of Others

Reassessing the EU

A first step in understanding and reassessing the EU means acknowledging that the EU as a global gender actor is neither a single nor a unitary actor, which causes significant analytical challenges in times of crisis. Therefore, the research agenda is to develop a comparative analysis involving multiple EU policies and actors. Such approach ideally contrasts EU external policy actors and areas, as well as bringing in EU internal politics and policies, and the specific history of its integration process on today's external policy. This means studying the meso-level, which refers to the characterisation of the different types of actors within the EU as a global gender actor (Manners, 2013a). In other words, to better understand the EU as a global gender actor, it is necessary to compare synergies and contradictions within EU external relations as well as spillovers and contradictions between EU internal policy and EU external gender policy.

EU trade policy, for instance, can be inherently contradictory with EU development policy, as trade liberalisation promoted by the EU might have a disproportionate effect on women because of unequal divisions of labour, resources, and power and might therefore be going directly against efforts by DG Development to promote women's rights and empowerment (Ulmer, 2004, 2007). Research shows that some key policy issues relevant to gender equality are strategically lumped together, while in other instances key issues are separated in different EU policies. An interesting example is the way in which the promotion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights or gender equality promoted by DG Development can become part of a myriad of other political struggles by other EU external policy actors – a policy area with obvious implications

for (intersections of) class, race, and gender. The success and failure of (gender) equality objectives in one policy field cannot be seen in isolation from what happens in other EU policy fields, particularly when the crisis of the deglobalisation of trade tends to repress concerns for gender equality.

A comparison between European trade and development policy is particularly fit to analyse internal contradictions in EU external relations, as aid and trade represent policy areas with contrasting underlying logics, which each relate differently to (gender) equality and mainstreaming. With its emphasis on eliminating trade barriers, trade liberalisation policies are based on ‘a non-interventionist logic’ seeking to improve the functioning of markets by freeing them of distorting barriers and obstacles (Van der Vleuten et al., 2014: 229). This stands in contrast with the interventionist logic inherent to (gender) equality policies and mainstreaming, which requires substantial policy intervention by the state. Indeed, while trade liberalisation at its core requires a reduced level of state intervention in the market, development aid is all about intervening in policies (Van der Vleuten et al., 2014). This is of course not to say that EU development policies have not been strongly affected by neoliberal discourse. However, the inherent interventionist logic in development aid and the non-interventionist logic of trade policies have made it easier for gender mainstreaming to travel in EU development policies (Van der Vleuten et al., 2014: 229). A comparative analysis of different policy fields and its contradictions is relevant for two reasons. First, such analysis of policies’ inherent contradictions explains why gender equality norms are faring well in one policy field, but less so in another throughout the crises. Second, bringing out policies’ fundamental dilemmas of ‘market versus democracy’ and ‘competitiveness versus social justice’ also reflects the EU’s specific institutional history and structure, and helps to get a clearer view on the EU as a global gender actor in the context of neoliberal crisis.

These fundamental dilemmas become apparent when bringing in EU internal politics and policies and using these as a lens to look at gender equality policies in EU external relations. Over the course of the EU’s integration process, the dualism between economic and social goals has become part of its identity and DNA (Orbie and Tortell, 2009). The social-economic dualism was first implicitly embedded in the Treaty of Rome and has remained a central struggle in EU politics in the decades to follow in both internal and external policies. As such, feminist policy actors who aim to keep gender equality policies high on the agenda clash with policy actors who see gender policies as distortions to the operation of the free market (True, 2009b). While the EU has often upheld an ideology based on a predominance of the market, the pluralist and open nature of EU decision-making processes have provided feminist MEPs, bureaucrats, and civil society groups with multiple access points to address key gender equality issues in its external and internal policy. In the institutional struggle for more gender equality, the external and internal policy agenda are intrinsically linked and are mutually influencing. For instance, in the late 1990s, gender advocates within the Commission’s internal policy departments benefitted from the work done by colleagues from DG Development in the framework of the preparations and outcomes of UN Beijing Conference and pushed for gender policies and mainstreaming in EU internal policies (Debusscher and True, 2009). To fully understand the EU as a global gender actor, it is key to take these different aspects of EU identity into account.

A second step forward in studying and understanding gender equality in EU external actions involves reassessing the EU *in the lives of others* during crises. The central question here is how the EU excludes/includes and is co-constituted through its engagement with others (Manners and Whitman, 2003: 381–383). As Stuart Hall pointed out 25 years ago:

Europe's external relations with its others has been central to the European story since its inception, and remains so. The story of European identity is often told as if it had no exterior. But this tells us more about how cultural identities are constructed – as 'imagined communities', through the marking of difference with others – than it does about the actual relations of unequal exchange and uneven development through which a common European identity was forged (Hall, 1991 in Manners, 2014: 263).

Of greatest interest is the role of Julia Kristeva's Lacanian psychoanalytically based work over the past three decades, in which the other is always part of the self – an abject-for-eigner which is part of our conscious and unconscious selves (Kristeva, 1982 in Manners, 2006: 178). One approach to overcoming such constructions of otherness and abjectness is through the concept of dialogicality developed by Mikhail Bakhtin and Tzvetan Todorov. Their work provided emphasis on understanding the pluralisms of self and other, encountered through dialogical engagements overcoming 'simplistic schema of 'friend/enemy'' (Todorov, 2005 in Manners, 2014: 272).

In practical terms, the encouragement of overcoming self/other binaries by understanding, not reifying, the lives of others and realising the possibilities of normative justification in EU external actions even during crises may be achieved through dialogue-based engagement informed by Bakhtin and Todorov's dialogicality (Guillaume, 2010). The importance of engagement and ownership in dialogue between the EU and others cannot be overstated (Manners, 2010, 2013a). Gurminder Bhambra's (2016) postcolonial work argues that a properly cosmopolitan Europe would be one which understood its historical constitution in colonialism cannot be rendered to the past by the denial of that past. In this respect, it is possible to suggest that dialogical engagement through recognition and empowerment, founded on understanding this historical constitution, would represent another step towards reassessing and potentially addressing EU external actions in the lives of others. In summary, a reassessment of the EU in the lives of others suggests that a means of acknowledging historical experiences, recognising and respecting identity and cultural diversity, and achieving an ethic of cooperation rather than coercion may be found through an emphasis on cosmopolitical co-existence (Manners, 2010, 2013b). At the same time, a policy of dialogical engagement mirrors Nira Yuval-Davis' (1997: 130) transversal politics of 'rooting' in historical experiences, identity and cultural diversity while 'shifting' in order to recognise and co-exist with differently rooted experiences.

Reassessing Gender

Scholarship on EU external relations has up to now focussed largely on gender equality alone, while the link with other sources of discrimination has received less attention. However, research on intersectionality has grown in prominence in gender studies and related fields over the last decades. Intersectionality was introduced by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) to address the problem that Black women are discriminated against not only on the basis of their gender but also due to their racial belonging, which creates a new and unique position of inequality. Pointing out that identities are not a set of separate and fixed differences that can simply be added to one another, intersectional research demonstrates how one identity – race, for instance – inevitably alters the meaning of, and is thus interdependent on, other social identity markers such as gender or (dis)ability (Grünenfelder and Schurr, 2015). As discussed, this emphasis on intersectionality is even more crucial under conditions of neoliberal crises that have differing effects of

austerity on class, unemployment on younger workers and the far-right on race, but for women at the intersections of these effects the consequences are magnitudes of difference.

Research into intersectionality thus refers to an approach that recognises that ‘gender, race, class, sexuality, age, ethnicity, ability and similar phenomena cannot be analytically understood in isolation’ from each other, as they are linked in an ‘intersecting constellation of power relationships that produce unequal material realities and distinctive social experiences’ for the individuals and groups positioned within them (Collins and Chepp, 2013: 58). Moving the focus from gender to ‘gender+’ is theoretically and empirically relevant for at least two reasons. First, including the relation between gender and other inequalities in EU external relations creates the analytical space for a more robust understanding of the privileges and penalties associated with intersecting systems of oppression and results in higher quality research (Collins and Chepp, 2013; Krizsán and Lombardo, 2013).

Second, in its internal policy, the EU has increasingly expanded its focus in the past decade to cover multiple equality strands and has urged its Member States to follow its lead (Kantola, 2010). Such an integrated approach to discrimination is thought to enable multiple discrimination and intersecting inequalities to be tackled better than by single-focus legislation and law enforcement bodies (Kantola, 2010: 171–172). So far, scholarship analysing intersectionality and multiple discrimination in EU external policies has been mostly lacking. A more intersectional or gender+ approach to studying external actions is thus appropriate, as the question remains whether these policy developments involving multiple and intersecting grounds of discrimination are also being taken up in the external relations of the EU and what consequences this has for the quality of European gender equality policies abroad. Expanding gender to include other inequality strands is key if we fully want to understand the EU as a global gender actor when inequality is being magnified by neoliberal crises.

A first key step when reassessing ‘gender’ to ‘gender+’ in EU external relations is turning our lens to the micro-level by studying the people affected by or influencing external policy as well as the policy and decision-makers involved. Zooming in on the micro-level with a holistic or gender+ lens reveals how gender often intersects with other hierarchical structures, such as class or race, and involves a study of how policy is impacted by and impacts (groups of) people. It shows how key actors and beneficiaries are positioned on the different axis of inequality and how this is linked with privilege, (dis)advantage or marginalisation. Such micro-level study also reveals which (groups of) people have a say in shaping EU external policy and how this shapes policy outcome.

In research experiences at the EU Delegations level, it is clear that the highest decision-making positions are taken up almost exclusively by white males (EU officials and higher) and that this has a direct influence on the particular framing of the policies relevant for promoting (gender) equality (Debusscher, 2014, 2015). Who counts as a family, how families are constituted, and how these relations are governed are highly relevant to the study of EU external actions as they often directly affect the (re)production of inequalities, not only of sex/gender and sexuality but also in relation to class, ethnicity/race, and nationality (see also Peterson, 2014).

At the level of the beneficiaries and people affected by EU policies, fieldwork gives multiple examples of how considering a gender+ perspective allows for a contextual reflexivity which unveils EU policy-makers’ Eurocentric and stereotypical assumptions on the promotion of gender equality abroad. For instance, EU discourses of ‘poor women’ in South Africa were criticised by women who lived in a context of poverty as

both paternalistic and stigmatising. They were critiquing policy measures as confining Black women to gender stereotypical roles with no upward mobility (see Debusscher, 2015). The way in which gender, race, and class intersect and alter the outcome of policies is particularly relevant to study whether and how the EU is contributing to social and gender justice.

Reassessing the Global

An obvious implication in the era of globalisation is that a holistic approach is a prerequisite for understanding contemporary Europe, forcing us beyond the conventions and conformities of binary thinking and narrow context, in order to think about a global European study that is holistic, contextual, and inclusive (see also Manners, 2013a). As discussed, when studying gender equality in EU external actions in neoliberal crisis, it is crucial to reassess the global in order to help turn the tide on narrow thinking that almost guarantees gender slips off the agenda in favour of the ‘security’ threats of ‘economic instability’, ‘waves of migrants’, and ‘liberal institutions’. A macro-approach in the study of the EU as a global gender actor refers to the development of ‘the holistic research programme’. A ‘broader scope’ to rethinking our macro-approach to the study of gender in EU external actions implies examining the wider international context with a longitudinal, crosscutting, rights-based, and intersectional lens able to see inequality hidden behind the ‘nexuses’ of crises (Allwood, 2019).

The relevance of the EU as a global gender actor has significantly increased over the past decades. Its increased prominence must be assessed in the context of historical trends at the global level, in which the EU as a global actor has been simultaneously influenced by and influencing global developments on gender and women’s empowerment. The global environment in which the EU and other actors are constituted has changed significantly over the past 20 years, as the international system increasingly gives way to the global life of multipolarity (Manners, 2013a: 311). The reassessments of ‘the EU’ and of ‘gender’ would thus not be complete without a reassessment of the global context in which gender equality in EU external actions takes place. A reassessment of the global involves regionalising, globalising, multilateralising and multipolarising processes, in particular the emergence of the 1% superclass, the social media data revolution, climatic crisis of the anthropocene, transnational conflicts and ideological criminal groups, and a rising extremism and conservatism in the Global North and South (Alston, 2013; Hozic and True, 2016; Kennet, 2017).

Rethinking the EU thus also means rethinking the EU in the context of the global, that is, the effect of developments in the international level on gender equality policies (Orbie et al, 2017). While a rising extremism and conservatism combined with successive economic and financial crises mostly seem to have a negative effect on the development of gender policy, global mobilising events in the framework of UN Conferences have had a positive effect on the development of gender policy in the EU – often in the first instance on EU external policy and later spilling over to its internal policy.

In the current international context, several governments across the EU have embarked on austerity measures and budget cuts that have often disproportionately affected people already in vulnerable positions. Internal policy debates within Europe have been challenging transformative (gender) equality policies, casting them as excessive luxuries or old-fashioned drags on the economic system, demanding too much focus on the structures of inequality while placing too little emphasis on ‘individual merit’ and ‘choice’. In this

period of stalemate, both conservative and economic motives prominently come to the fore in EU internal policy, and Member States are weary to accept new (gender) equality measures (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017). However, interestingly, in EU external policies, the dynamics seem to be going in the reverse direction as well. Due to the increased global mobilisation in the framework of the post-2015 framework, the Commission has rolled out an ambitious gender action plan to guide the EU's external actions in its development and external policies in the coming years.

Gender advocates working on development and external relations in the Commission and the Member States have commented that the international process to develop a post-MDG (Millennium Development Goal) development framework provided significant momentum to push the agenda for (gender) equality forward. EU gender advocates have described the policy process leading up to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a unique opportunity to broaden and deepen the gender equality agenda and move beyond the predominant focus on gender issues in education and health (Equal Measures 2030, 2018; UN Women, 2014). Despite the standstill in EU internal policy, the EU seems to have strengthened its position on gender equality and human rights in EU foreign affairs and development cooperation since 2015.

In sum, to take gender and EU external policy research forward in the next decade, we believe it is necessary to reassess our subject of study from an intersectional lens, accounting for both EU dialogic engagement and the changing dynamics of a global nature. Such intersectional approach to analysing gender+ in EU external actions would benefit from the development of its macro-approach, meso-characterisation, and micro-analysis in order to understand the differential effects of neoliberal crises.

Conclusion: A Holistic Intersectional and Inclusive Study of Gender+ in EU External Actions

Scholarship on gender equality in EU external relations has been highly relevant in understanding, explaining, and judging the EU's role in global politics from a gender perspective. Yet, within the context of the multiple crises of the EU, in order to develop gender and external relations scholarship in its second decade, it is necessary to rethink the study of the EU as a global gender actor. Drawing on scholarly debates, we propose a distinctive theoretical and methodological approach, involving a holistic intersectional and inclusive study of gender+ in EU external actions.

First, we proposed a twofold rethink of the EU as the object of study. We argued that the EU is never a unitary actor and proposed a *comparative approach* taking *multiple policies and actors* into account so as to generate a deeper understanding of the EU as a global gender actor. Next, we argued that in analysing the EU in the lives of others, it is key to acknowledge that the Other is always part of the Self. This implies a *dialogue-based approach* to better understand the EU's role as a gender equality promoter, as well as its relation to the lives of others. Dialogue-based engagement demands an inclusive and participatory approach as well as the use of non-European sources. In this way, it becomes easier to understand how the EU is and should respond as a global gender actor in order to address crises-related challenges to intersectional and inclusive gender+ external actions.

Second, we proposed a rethink of gender, as the focus on women and men alone creates a limited understanding of systems of privilege and oppression under conditions of neoliberal crises. The approach to analyse EU policies abroad thus needs to be broadened

from a gender to a *gender+ approach* and analyse the extent to which intersectionality is considered. The fact that we are analysing policies which are destined for a non-European context renders these research questions more complex and demands an inclusive, participatory dialogue-based approach as to understand the (un)intended consequences of (gender) equality policies in the lives of others. The methodological approach taken here is that scholarship needs to explicitly include the voices of women and men who are involved in and are affected by EU external actions. Developments in new (social) media can provide opportunities for dialogue-based research approaches as it allows researchers to broaden the discussion and ask questions such as ‘what does a Togolese feminist sound like and what does (s)he want the EU to take on board in its external policy?’ This approach will help understanding and addressing the impact which the crises are having on gender relations and the promotion of gender equality in more intersectionally aware and inclusive gender+ external actions.

Third, the rethinking of the global demands a holistic perspective to look at EU (gender) equality policies, involving the changing international context in our analysis as well as an explicit recognition of Europe’s colonial legacy. To analyse the changing international context as well as Europe’s role in it, a *broad and longitudinal approach* is key. Within this longitudinal perspective, past and current power structures stemming from patriarchal and colonial structures need to be made explicit as much as possible and connected with the (changing) nature of gender+ policies in EU external relations. By adopting such a holistic and longitudinal approach, it becomes easier to identify the gendered construction of crises in the field of EU external actions and to recognise the inter-relatedness of neoliberal economic, social, conflictual, environmental, and political crises for EU gender equality promotion.

Taking these three proposals together, a holistic approach to the crises must analyse how they affect intersectionalities differently, in order to encourage more inclusive approaches to addressing the effects of crises on EU gender equality promotion. In other words, the holistic intersectional and inclusive study of gender+ in EU External Actions is a prerequisite for understanding the EU as a global gender actor.

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